

Ethics Toolkit 2018–2019

PRSSA Public Relations
Student Society
of America



September 2018

Dear PRSSA Member:

As we begin another Ethics Month, we are reminded that the public relations profession changes every day. The ethical standards that we practice must be continuously evaluated to ensure the success of the industry and our roles as leaders. The PRSA Code of Ethics serves as a guide to help us navigate ethical dilemmas and the ethical practice of public relations.

This toolkit is provided to educate you and your Chapter about the resources that PRSSA and PRSA offer. Even though we are only students, we can still educate ourselves about ethical standards and how to be prepared for any ethical dilemma in our futures. We, as a Society, can ensure this by challenging our members to have open discussions about the applications of ethics.

My hope is that you use this as a resource to examine the applications of ethics in the profession and further your understanding about the PRSA Code of Ethics in order to recognize ethical concerns or crises before they occur. Review the materials included in this toolkit and consider ways to implement them in your Chapter. If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Please remember that even though we focus on ethics content in September, that ethics should be a daily conversation. I hope this toolkit can help your Chapter become prepared, proactive and proud.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ashleigh Kathryn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ashleigh Kathryn
PRSSA 2018–2019 Vice President of Professional Development

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Section 1: Contents

1.1 Introduction

The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) values that public relations hinges on the ethics of its practitioners. As a future professional, it is essential that you uphold the highest ethical standards. PRSSA promotes ethical practice by asking members to adhere to the [PRSA Code of Ethics](#) and encourages all Chapters to have members sign the pledge upon joining the organization.

Leadership in ethics issues among Chapters is encouraged and recognized through the Star Chapter Award, which honors Chapters that plan and conduct outstanding activities to promote ethical practice.

The following toolkit aims to improve members' overall understanding of ethical standards within PRSSA and to serve as a template for Chapters in understanding, maintaining and promoting ethics at their universities.

1.2 Official Position on Ethics

All PRSSA members are expected to uphold the pillars of professionalism, advancement and ethical behavior clearly defined in the PRSA Code of Ethics, to ensure a noble progression of advocacy through the public relations fields.

1.3 Ethical Responsibility

The mission of PRSSA is to “To provide exceptional service to our members by enhancing their education, broadening their professional network and helping launch their careers after graduation.” PRSSA hopes to instill ethical responsibility into its members by enhancing their education and understanding of current ethical standards. This will equip our members to be ethically responsible as leaders within the profession.

This responsibility is furthermore emphasized in the [PRSSA Vision and Strategic Plan](#).

Section 2: Ethics FAQ

What is the PRSA Code of Ethics and where can I find them?

The PRSA Code of Ethics is “designed to be a useful guide for PRSA members as they carry out their ethical responsibilities.” They include the main tenets of the Code as well as Provisions of Conduct, which further explains each principle and scenarios that they may apply to. You can find them on the PRSA website at <https://www.prsa.org/ethics/code-of-ethics/>

How can the PRSA Code of Ethics apply to me as a student?

Learning the fundamentals of ethical dilemmas will help you prepare for tough situations in the future. It's easy to point out the shortcomings of brands and companies but it might not be as clear or distinct from the other side. We cannot only continue to educate ourselves on these principles but teach others how to be proactive and avoid conflict. PRSSA students are rising leaders in the public relations profession. We have an obligation to the profession, the Society and ourselves to be ethical. We need to be confident in our ability to be effective and socially responsible professionals. We need to be proud as ethical PRSSA students.

What resources does PRSA/PRSSA offer as resources for ethical dilemmas?

PRSSA hosts Ethics Month in September to emphasize ethics as a conversation in the profession; however, ethics is always at the forefront of what PRSSA does. We share and produce content that educates students while recommending them to use PRSA resources. PRSA hosts an Ethics Month in addition to PRSSA but offers counsel in many other forms. They have a Board of Ethics and Professional Standards, which provides advice to members and the Society on ethical dilemmas. BEPS implements Ethical Standards Advisories, Ethics Moments and monthly blog posts to educate and inform PRSA members. Finally, they commit to an Ethics Pledge, which is available for all students to sign. More information can be found at <https://www.prsa.org/ethics/>

What are some common issues that students could look at today and learn from?

Multiple issues have arisen with the emergence of social media and technology. This is a great go-to topic to talk about because it affects us all. We now have to deal with privacy rights, viral content and a competitive news industry. There is even more pressure to be punctual yet accurate. Other issues are more internal and subtle such as when an employer or boss asks you to perform a task that conflicts with the PRSA Code of Ethics. Ethics is present in the world around us. Open your Twitter feed and challenge yourself to explore where the PRSA Code of Ethics could come into play.

Who should I go to as a student about an ethical dilemma?

Definitely check out the resources mentioned above. If you are still having trouble answering a question, seek guidance from a mentor or professional in your community. This means professors, administrators, past employers, etc. (This is a benefit of having a mentor, especially within PRSA.) If nothing is resolved, please reach out to PRSSA officials who can direct you to the best resource.

Is there more than one code of ethics?

Yes. Many professional societies within the industry have a code of ethics that they follow. Although the PRSA Code of Ethics applies to public relations, many of the same themes and principles transcend across sectors such as in telecommunications and journalism. Examples include the Society of Professional Journalists and the Radio Television Digital News Association.

Section 3: Ethics Programming

Ethics Month is traditionally every September. This aligns with PRSA Ethics Month, so that both organizations can share content and collaborate. Content typically includes shared articles, Twitter Chats, podcasts and more. There are many opportunities for

your Chapter to get involved during this month specifically, but there are still other ways to implement ethics into your schedule throughout the year.

Programming includes, but is not limited to:

- **PRSA Code of Ethics Pledge.** Have your members sign the [PRSA Code of Ethics Pledge](#) during a meeting. Go through each tenet and discuss how these values could apply to professional work. Another option could include collaborating with your Student-run Firm to present on these values and how they implement them through campaigns. Nationally Affiliated Student-run Firms should be able to discuss ethics, as it is a part of the application process for this designation. Share the signed pledges via social media.
- **Case-Study Review.** Host a meeting and review case-studies that encourage students to think about the PRSA Code of Ethics principles and the six code provisions of conduct. Try to utilize current events to your advantage. Students engage more with recent events that they can relate to. Examples of this include the 2018 Facebook ethical dilemma or the United Airlines crises.
- **Case-Study Competition.** Work with PRSA members or a professional to create an ethical dilemma or scenario. Break members out into teams and have them draft a crisis communications plan. Professionals or PRSA members can attend and help judge. The best presentation could win a prize like extra-credit or award.
- **Twitter Chat Social.** Gather with your members to participate in an ethics Twitter Chat social. Make it a potluck or bring snacks and music to make it more engaging. The student with the most retweets or likes could win a prize!
- **Ethics Trivia.** Create a jeopardy style game with the PRSA Code of Ethics and provisions of conduct. You can mix in case-study examples from above to make it more interesting.
- **PRSA/Professional Panel.** Invite alumni and PRSA members back to discuss their careers. Ask about dilemmas they've encountered and how they handled it. This is a great opportunity to learn from their ethical successes and mistakes.
- **Movie Night.** Pick a documentary, film or television show to watch with your Chapter and analyze. Create questions to engage with during the showing or after. Popular programs for this include: "The Insider," "The Devil Wears Prada" and "The Office." There are more programs to explore, so have fun with this event and make it engaging. Bring some popcorn or have a "dress down" fundraiser where members can pay a dollar to come in pajamas and have a movie night. Having an engaging atmosphere is key toward learning.
- **Share Content.** Have your Chapter create its own ethics campaign to share via social media or blog. This is a great way to engage new members who are eager to build their portfolio.

Your Chapter could also collaborate with your university's business school to host these events. This could increase recruitment and retention. Also, please note that these examples can currently be applied toward the Star Chapter Award as a fulfilled requirement.



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